

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI
CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE SOCIOLOGIE ȘI ASISTENȚĂ SOCIALĂ
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE SOCIOLOGIE**

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Rezumatul tezei de doctorat

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**Motivații și strategii în accesarea învățământului superior în
regiunea transfrontalieră "Partium"**

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**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
CLUJ-NAPOCA
THE FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK
THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF SOCIOLOGY**

**Motivations and Strategies of Pursuing Higher Education in
the "Partium" Cross-border Region**

Abstract of the PhD thesis

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BABEŞ-BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
KOLOZSVÁR
SZOCIOLÓGIA ÉS SZOCIÁLIS MUNKA KAR
SZOCIOLÓGIA DOKTORI ISKOLA

Továbbtanulási és intézményválasztási motivációk
a Partiumi régió határmenti térségében

A doktori disszertáció kivonata

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KEYWORDS:

youth, higher education, motivations, sociology of education, values, attitudes towards learning, Romania-Hungary cross-border area

INTRODUCTION

THESIS STRUCTURE

The author presents the structure of the thesis, which was shaped, by the formal rules on one hand, and by the main research objectives, on the other hand. The first part of the thesis contains the presentation of a series of theories and models from the sociology of education, as well as the main results of previous research on the subject. First, the regional context of higher education is presented; without it, it would be difficult to understand the meanings of the issues included in the study. Then, the main sociological theories are presented, after which, given that this is the main objective of the research, results were described using an interdisciplinary approach of motivational analyses.

The thesis is based on and presents the results of previous research, be it international, European or national, in order to clarify research questions. The methodological part of the thesis first comprises the research questions that guided the selection of the theme, as well as a description of the purpose and target group of the research. Then, the hypotheses and used methods are unveiled, together with the sample and the development of the research.

The chapter which presents results contains the main characteristics of students accessing the higher education system and highlights their socio-demographic context (institutions, sex, age, residence, social background, parents' education and occupation, secondary education).

The results regarding student motivation related to continuing studies, the choice of the institution of higher education (HEI) and specialization, are the main purpose of the thesis; also, values, attitudes towards learning and the learning environment are analyzed in the context of future plans. The section concerning the presentation of results concludes with the description of the most important similarities and differences between institutions.

All these factors were analyzed in a separate chapter, and an explanatory model was created using the multinomial logistic regression method. In the final part of the paper, there is a brief summary of the research results, advancing the most important conclusions following the order of the hypotheses. Last, conclusions are drawn and suggestions for future research directions are made. The thesis includes the bibliography and an annex with the larger tables.

The innovation brought by this thesis is, first of all, the fact that the nature of the mechanisms that impact on decisions to continue studies is analyzed in relation to the cultural and relational dimensions of social capital, beyond rational evaluation and the effects of social context; it also comprises the influence of value systems and attitudes towards learning, at the level of HEI of the Partium region, in the Romania-Hungary border area.

PRESENTATION OF THE INVESTIGATED ISSUES

One of the main challenges and tasks for young people is that they have to reflect and define their most important goals, hopes and expectations regarding their future. These decisions include pursuing higher education. The decision to continue the education process is usually analyzed from three perspectives: sociological, psychological and economic. From the sociological perspective, the choice of continuation of learning is linked to the quest for status; the spotlight is on those factors from the each individual's social context that significantly affects the decision to pursue education within the tertiary education system. The psychological perspective focuses on the academic atmosphere, especially on how student perceptions about the academic atmosphere influences the choice of institution. In the economic approach, the university selection process is considered an decision of investment: students weigh the costs and benefits of continuing studies at university level and the decision is taken after evaluating the economic benefits of post-secondary studies (Bergerson, 2009). In this thesis, the analysis of the decision-making process related to academic studies is made from a sociological point of view, first of all, but the psychological and economic approaches could not completely ignored when trying to identify motivational factors.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the problem of social inequality within the educational context together with the role of the education system in reproducing social inequalities has become one of the fundamental concerns of sociological research. A priority research topic, generated by the expansion of secondary education, was to determine the extent to which individuals belonging to different social classes accessed secondary education. Another important theme was the type of higher education pursued and the analysis of the role of compulsory education in achieving equality of chances. European sociology has been particularly marked by capital theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, when dealing with these issues (apud. Hrubos, 2012).

According to Usher (2009), the issue of higher education used to be quite simple in earlier times. The purpose of higher education was clearly and uniformly understood: students were trained to become experts in a particular field, and, after graduation, they had to occupy prestigious positions in elite science institutions, within the chosen profession or the government. In the top of the hierarchy, there were the oldest institutions which attracted the most capable and wealthy students at the time, through their prestige. Students usually completed their studies in the school in which they started higher education and later on, their entire career unfolded within the profession or the economic branch which was specific to the completed studies.

Education, and higher education in particular, has become a mass phenomenon among young people worldwide, thus, the demand for research on higher education increased, which, at the same time, have become much more affordable. The process, of course, led to the transformation of education and the diversification of training opportunities. The American researcher Thomas F. Green (1999) found, while studying the phenomenon of expansion of education, that while those individuals who have completed a certain level of education (such as high school) are few within a community, this brings little benefit to the individual as the level of education does not act as a social filter. On the other hand, if enough individuals reach a certain level of education, then there is choice among potential candidates for a job; the absence or the existence of education manifests itself as a filter in this case, thus increasing the benefits of enrollment. However, in the situation in which more individuals obtain a graduation certificate, i.e. if most of them obtain a certain level of education, an inflation of education takes place. All of the above can be summarized in a comprehensive interpretation: while the number of participants in education continuously increases, the benefits of schooling tend to increase for a while, and then to fall dramatically, and when almost all individuals reach a certain level of schooling, the total benefit tends to zero. Green (1999) draws attention to the fact that when a level of education becomes a mass phenomenon, while the potential personal benefit decreases, the value of the educational institutions offering the certificate increases.

Contrary to expectations, the expansion of education has not led to a equalization of opportunities within the society. This has already been suggested by previous Hungarian research (see, for example, Ferge, 1972; Gázsó, 1971), which focused on the inequality of educational opportunities; they already showed in the 70s that children that came from families with a lower status headed to vocational schools, while children of intellectuals attended high schools. Ladányi's study from 1994 showed that the number of students belonging to the first generation of intellectuals

is higher in colleges than in universities (Ladányi, 1994). With the mass expansion of higher education, institutions of tertiary education have adapted to the increased demand for education. The decision to pursue education at the next level is inevitably linked to the aspirations of young people in terms of career and the direction of the social mobility in the future. Becoming an intellectual seems to be a possible solution for upward social mobility, for obtaining a social status; graduating from higher education is, for many, a kind of guarantee for the future. This paper, however, does not study the relationship between social mobility and the education system, it focuses on pursuing education itself and field choice, as well as the context of individual and social motivation. The scientific literature on motivation, social inequality and higher education played a key role in the preparation, planning and interpretation of results of the sociological research. The sources that were considered to be utmost related to the topic and the regional issues were chosen from a multitude of various publications.

THEME SELECTION. THE PURPOSE AND TERRITORIAL FRAMING OF THE RESEARCH

Higher education in Eastern Europe differs in many respects from the West and Far East in terms of higher education: given the relevance of indicators of mass higher education and the studied region, the analysis of higher education is significant only for a small part of society. The transformation of higher education, including in this region, was produced by change of regime in the 90s, followed by the introduction and implementation of international educational policies and of economic, social and political processes that impact on the education system. A trait of the higher education system from the region was the low number of students, which is characteristic for the type of elite higher education, due to political and ideological reasons. Meanwhile, in the West, higher education had a general, mass nature. The process in which higher education becomes a mass phenomenon is called the expansion of higher education in scientific publication (Hrubos, 2012; Kozma, 2004, 2006; Kozma & Rébay, 2004; Ladányi, 1994; Polónyi, 2010; Temesi, Hrubos, & Berács, 2012).

The defining feature of the expansion of higher education in Eastern Europe is the fact that the processes that have determined education to reach a mass level took place quickly and almost simultaneously within the countries of the region; these processes had taken place over several decades in more developed countries. Most likely, this is the main reason for which, secondary and

tertiary education has encountered serious problems in Eastern Europe, affecting its quality through a decrease in the effectiveness of teaching, a downturn in pupils' and students' school preparedness, etc. (Hrubos, 2012; Kozma, 2004; Pusztai, 2011).

Thus, in the context of massification, the themes of continuing studies and of major choice can be addressed by using specific tools and by raising specific questions from several disciplines. If the transformation of higher education is approached by the sociology of education, it can be explained by using a complex series of factors, each leading to new and new questions and analyses. A different view of researching higher education is that, while many new opportunities for further education arise, groups of candidates that want to pursue higher education are constantly and rapidly changing in the whirl of macro processes. At the same time, with some interruptions, a continuous process of rather a inconsistent reform of the education system is developing, while its social consequences have not been properly explored yet.

The complexity of the issues discussed so far suggest that sociological research on the choice of major within an educational environment in constant change is a tricky challenge, both theoretically and methodologically. Various studies on the subject have been undertaken, however, they do not seek to drain the subject, but to become new elements of the "sociological mosaic". The research presented hereby aims at contributing to this "mosaic" by quantitatively analyzing the aspects of major choice. First, answers were sought to answer the question of motivations that lay behind the decision of young candidates to continue their studies within HEIs from the Partium region.

In the present research, young people's motivational background for pursuing higher education (Bachelor degree) and choosing majors is studied in the Partium geographical area, in order to obtain a wider scientific knowledge of the specific mechanisms. On the other hand, the research also has a practical importance because, through it, HEIs may have acces to expertise about young candidates, about the "profile" of young people entering university; young people who face career decisions may gain a broader view of educational opportunities and of the offer of various universities and colleges. The author believes that the findings and conclusions of the survey can also be used for high school teachers in offering career guidance for pupils.

The choice of theme was influenced by matters of a personal nature. As a university lecturer, the author regularly interacts with students enrolled at the Partium Christian University and discusses

their motivations and the situation leading to the decision to continue their studies. The aim was to collect more information about these issues, about students' value systems, about social models of enrollment and learning, as well as to contribute to the educational offer and services of the university.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is shaped by the literature that refers to pursuing higher education and career choice. Thus, the correlation between career choice and further training was investigated, with choice of HEI and major. The patterns of choice of young adults who have taken independent decisions regarding further training were studied, but as the author is a sociologist, this influenced the way of answering research questions, including the main social characteristics of the target group. The impact of family, demographics and broader social background on school performance is indirectly studied here also from the perspective of family values and cultural fashions, beyond the relationship with HEI choice (Róbert, 2000).

The effects of school performance on continuing studies can be analysed through the lens of reproduction theories. At the same time, much of the research based on contextual theories surpass the study of the effect of status, level of education and parents' (especially father's) occupational status on school performance and continuing studies and focus on the concept of social capital, including the role of learning communities or institutional culture, reaching previously neglected elements. There are significant differences between departments and majors in HEIs, both in terms of recruitment base and social prestige of the associated careers. These features are analyzed from the viewpoint of reproductive patterns, taking into account differences parents' education levels. It is also explained that the social situation that determines their fathers' status has a significant role in this respect and other factors related to student lifestyle and academic performance are important as well (Mare, 1981; Pusztai, 2011).

School achievements and the decisions to pursue higher education are influenced by social capital (especially cultural and relational capital) and by the students' value system; accordingly, these factors have been introduced in the data analysis, beyond the simple interpretation of the relationship through the reproduction model. This situation permits the identification of less visible differences among individuals, as well as the exploration of social models for student recruitment.

METHODOLOGY

The source of the data used in the research is the result of the quantitative study (a questionnaire-based cross-sectional survey) carried out within the HERD¹ project. The study was jointly undertaken by research teams (consisting mainly of sociologists) from three institutions, the University of Debrecen, the University of Oradea and the Partium Christian University. The survey included a total of 2728 questionnaires completed by respondents.

Those students were questioned within the survey who enrolled in higher education institutions from the historic cities of the Partium² region, i.e. from Oradea, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza. The counties included in the survey (Bihar, Bihar, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg) are separated by the Romanian-Hungarian border, but they are similar in several respects: all three locations are peripheral in the country where they are located. As long as the border has a dominant separative nature, these counties were considered disadvantaged regions, and even now they are moderately or poorly developed. No more borders meant the recreation of the possibility to cooperate in this region, which, since the early Middle Ages, had a fairly uniform development (Kozma, Teperics, Erdei, & Tózsér, 2011). The countries that joined the European Union in the meanwhile have established intense relations, promoting the implementation of many euro-regional level cooperation projects (Czimre, 2006). Among the areas of cooperation, an important role was played by education and research. HEIs from the region and their research institutes have had key roles - from the latter, the activities of the Center for Research and Development of Higher Education (CHERD³) from the University of Debrecen (CHERD) have been particularly important. One part of the entire sample was selected in order to answer the research questions that emerged in this thesis. Those students were selected who enrolled in all the ten higher education institutions that were included in the survey, from the Hungarian-Romanian border, i.e. from Oradea, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza.

¹ HERD is an acronym of the project “*Higher Education for Social Cohesion - Cooperative Research and Development in a Cross-border Area*”. The project was financed by the European Regional Development Fund of the European Union through the Hungary-Romania Cross Border Cooperation Programme. Data collection took place in spring 2012 (N = 2728). The overall aim of the project was to analyze the role of higher education in strengthening social cohesion. Further details about the project can be found on the project website: <http://unideb.mskszmsz.hu/>. Project leaders permitted the use of the database for research purposes.

² Partium is a historical cross-border region that stretches from Hungary to Romania and the Ukraine. The territories included in the region stretch along the borders of countries and have a mostly peripheral situation (Kozma, 2005).

³ Instituția derulează cercetări fundamentale și aplicative în domeniul educației superioare, în regiunile de frontieră ale Partium-ului.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

According to the author of the thesis, the greatest strength of the study is represented by its cross-border nature, because it allows a comparative approach of the higher education systems from the two neighboring countries. In the last decade, the region - mainly due to the CHERD Research Centre of the University of Debrecen - a high number of large-scale transnational sociological research was carried out regarding education; however, they only slightly touch the the theme of this thesis. The nature of the research determined the quality of available data that allows testing the community of students from the area from the viewpoint of a very large number of topics: socio-economic background, lifestyle, system of values, future plans and attitudes towards learning, continuing education, and so on.

The main limits of this study are result of the limitations of the method of application of the instruments. The questionnaires were self-administered, thus it is expected that data collection be impacted by a systematic error of over-representing students who frequent university more often. Non-traditional students who fail to take part in all courses and students with weak performance are under-represented. In addition, there may be deviations arising from the regulations of universities and faculties regarding attendance periods, particularly, so far as they are correlated with variables defined for institutions and countries of origin. Based on the analyses it can be assumed, for example, that class attendance is lower at the University of Oradea and at the Partium Christian University than in Hungary or at Emanuel University. One can assume, further on, that at the University of Oradea and Partium Christian University non-traditional students (older students, employed) or students with poor performance are under-represented . Of course, when designing the sub-sample, this was taken into account and attempts were done to compensate for this error; therefore, it can be said that the sample is representative for these universities only for students who do or do not pay fees, knowing that students who pay tuition fees are under-represented among respondents.

Another important limit of the study results from the various training offers of the studied institutions. Only two of the analyzed educational institutions cover all fields of study. Thus, a comparative analysis of the data relating to the choice of major can only be achieved between the educational offers of the two larger HEIs and the three smaller institutions, separately.

Finally, the issues related to continuing education were marginal within the HERD project, so the collected data allow only a partial analysis of the variables that may be related to the theme. The research results could be enriched by collecting additional data, by using other methodologies and another interpretative theoretical framework based on a broader range of reasons and motivations for pursuing higher education.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

TARGET GROUP, THEME AND TIME SPAN OF THE STUDY

According to the author, the empirical research⁴ which is part of the thesis was based on data from the HERD project. The focus was on higher education institutions from the Romania-Hungary cross-border area. The project summary contains information about the main objectives and context of the project (HERD, 2012). The research theme applied to a relatively large geographic area is determined by a similar history of the area: the region is relatively uniform in terms of socio-economic and educational history, but in the past decades, not only did it have a peripheral position, but social inequality, cultural diversity, territorial fragmentation and the general level of distrust were quite developed, making it difficult to respond to the opportunities and challenges that emerged. In the thesis the various dimensions of the efficiency of higher education is analyzed within this socio-economically disadvantaged region, to the extent that this may be done.

The target group of the study is made up of students enrolled in higher education institutions from the Partium region, who share a common history and are similar in many ways: each comes from a peripheral area of the country of residence; as long as the separative nature of the border was dominant, these counties were considered disadvantaged regions.

⁴ I would like to take this opportunity and thank for the possibility to participate in this research.

Research goals and methods

As anticipated in the introduction, the research was based on the interpretation of data obtained from the project HERD, regarding students. The complete database includes data from other institutions, in addition to those listed above, and includes Masters' programs. But, the specific distribution of the number of cases would not have allowed a correct comparison, if the entire database was used. Thus, those institutions and those respondents were filtered who did not meet the conditions and objectives set out in the investigation. As a result, the sub-sample included students who study at five institutions of higher education, in order to obtain a Bachelors' degree. The vast majority of respondents from the sub-sample is registered at the University of Debrecen (N = 886), 565 students at the University of Oradea, 400 at Partium Christian University, 125 respondents at Emanuel University from Oradea and 144 students from the College of Nyíregyháza. The target group of this research is composed of 2120 persons out of the total included in the database.

The scientific material resulting from the research can be a pillar for career counselling and institutional development, through the information on motivations to pursue higher education provided, and also serves to enrich the results of empirical research on recruitment mechanisms of cross-border higher education institutions and on young students.

The main research questions

The analysis carried tried to answer the following questions: What determines career choice to a greater extent – external or internal motivations, materials or post-material values? Are reproduction or contextual factors those which determine the educational path of young people? Can the influence of the type of locality of origin be determined or is the disappearance of social inequalities in the context of expansion oh higher education in the region a current theme?

Striving to answer questions above, the present study analyzes factors that influenced the respondents in their decision to continue studying in higher education institutions: socio-economic mechanisms and motivations that determined the choice to continue studies, the choice of the HEI and major.

Research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical models, on the understanding of the geographical and institutional context of educational policies and of the results of previous research, three hypotheses were set, which represent the main direction of analyses.

According to Green (1999), when reaching a certain level of education extends to a mass level and the benefits of schooling tend to decrease for the individual, the value of the educational institution that offers the certificate increases. The results of international research show that young people from families with a lower socio-economic status are more likely to choose HEIs that are closer to home and less prestigious. Thus, according to the first hypothesis, students from families with lower socio-economic status will choose institutions closer to home and those from families with higher statuses will choose the most prestigious institutions from the region: Hungarian students will prefer University of Debrecen in the detriment of the College of Nyíregyháza, while Romanian students will choose the University of Oradea, rather than Emanuel University; Hungarian students enrolled at the Christian University Partium are most likely to come rather from families with lower socio-economic status.

The plans to continue education are associated with parents' education levels and students' skills, but also with the characteristics of the students' value systems. In higher education institutions seeking for a status (in this case, the Hungarian sub-sample), access is based on social reproduction, while in higher education institutions seeking for customers (such as the Romanian HEIs), recruitment is rather egalitarian. It is assumed, therefore, that the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen will rather accept students from families of intellectuals, while at the College of Nyíregyháza, the Partium Christian University and the Emanuel University, candidates' aims are more likely linked to mobility. In addition, students with high socio-economic status (people living in better equipped households), those interested in material values and potential male candidates will enter prestigious institutions and choose majors that are closer to labor market dynamics (leading public universities, natural and applied sciences). Students from several rural areas, those representing the first generation of intellectuals, women and older students, or former students of private or religious high-schools with access especially HEIs such as the College of Nyíregyháza, Partium University and Emanuel University.

Similarly, significant differences between the various departments and specializations were observed. Students' careers are strongly influenced by the context of higher education, so it is more difficult for students with a lower status to achieve performances in faculties where they are more numerous, confirming Coleman's theory on the selection mechanisms in public higher education (Pusztai, 2011). Thirdly, it is assumed that gender differences and occupational stereotypes are also important aspects in choosing a major: men choose more dynamic, competitive study programs, which require risk-taking, while women choose study programs regarding communication, building interpersonal relationships or services. The distribution by gender is an important predictor of choosing the institution, given that some universities offer education programs only in certain areas. Engineering and natural sciences are not included in the offer of educational programs of private or smaller state universities, so it is likely that males enroll at the two larger state universities from the selected sample.

Data from a survey conducted among students from five higher education institutions were used to test hypotheses. The main results of the research will be presented next.

Characteristics of the data and methods used in the research

The author analyzes the data of a quantitative, transversal study. Questionnaires were completed between the spring and summer of 2012, as planned in the HERD project. Respondents received self-administering the questionnaires and were asked to respond to questions about a range of topics related to the peculiarities of the student status. In this way, new information on school career, socio-demographic context, HE enrollment system was found, beyond customs, value systems and attitudes towards learning. At the same time, conclusions were drawn about the changes in the direction of student life, career and expected future. It is important to be aware of the limit in the correctness of this picture, due to the risk of distortion which results from the subjects' memories (Babbie, 2003).

Although this matter does not fall within the main objectives of the HERD project, a main goal of the thesis is to obtain a more accurate image of the motivations that lay beyond enrollment in higher education and the circumstances and motivations of major choice. These issues are analyzed also depending on the dimensions identified in scientific literature, based on available data. Thus, the

research is, on the one hand, descriptive or explorative, and, on the other hand, explaining motivations to pursue HE are sought out: the factors underlying certain social situations are explored, in order to identify the main elements that influence career choice, HEIs, majors, and to find out if the variations depending on the family of origin, type of settlement, high school achievement, attitudes towards higher education studies and value systems play an important role in this respect. Deduction was mainly used in data analysis for testing the hypotheses based on due literature, theories and previous research.

Paper questionnaires were self-administered (with the help of instructors) to students from the following institutions: the College of Nyíregyháza - Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Agriculture, Teacher Training Department; the University of Debrecen; Partium Christian University; the University of Oradea; Emanuel University from Oradea; the Reformed Theological University from Debrecen - „Kölcsey Ferenc” Reformed Teacher Training Department; the Rákóczi Ferenc II Transcarpathian Hungarian College; the National University of Ungvár – the Faculties of Hungarian Language, Humanities and Natural Sciences; the branch from Satu Mare of the Babeş-Bolyai University – the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. The total size of the sample is 2728 students registered at the listed institutions. Out of these, the Hungarian sample is made up of 1296 people and the Romanian one of 1323 people; the transcarpathic sample included responses from 109 students. Answers were voluntary and anonymous.

From all the respondents from the higher education institutions included in the study, only those responses were investigated which belonged to 2120 undergraduate students studying at the five institutions from Romania and Hungary: the University of Oradea, Partium Christian University and Emanuel University from Oradea, as well as the University of Debrecen and the College of Nyíregyháza⁵. In this research, multi-stage and stratified sampling techniques samples were used, varying by country. Judging by the differences observed between countries in the types of educational and demographic policies, the main hypotheses were analyzed from the perspective of the types of institutions, in order to eliminate any potential sampling error; thus, weighting cases was not necessary⁶. Of course, given the limits of the research, responding to the peculiarities of the study was attempted simultaneously.

⁵ Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Agriculture, Teacher Training Department

⁶ See Adrian Hatos (2012) for details about the analyzed sample

Statistic analyses within the research

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics and univariate analysis were useful in comparing means of variables. Bivariate analyzes included correlation and contingency tables and variance analysis, to reflect fundamental differences between variables. Latent structures behind motivations, scales of values and learning attitudes were highlighted through factor analysis. The relationship between the types of institutions and factors influencing values was determined by discriminant analysis, while multinomial logistic regression was used in the construction and interpretation of explanatory models. Factors influencing aspirations of pursuing education were investigated separately (through contextual analysis) and also by multivariate analysis (multinomial logistic regression).

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN RESEARCH RESULTS, BASED ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Based on results and according to the literature on the subject, the conclusions on the studied population can be drawn. The decision to continue studies, and, within it, the choice of major, is a long term process, which develops under the influence of academic, personal, social, psychological and financial aspects. In addition to these objective social factors, there are a number of factors that have indirect effects.

The sample included 2120 respondents from 5 HEIs from the Hungary-Romania cross border area, out of which 35,5% males and 64,5% females. Most respondents belong to the Y generation. The age distribution revealed no significant differences between institutions or years of study. The most part of respondents come from rural areas or small towns, 44% have lived their first 14 years of life in villages, one third (32%) in the county seat, while almost a quarter (23.8%) in smaller cities. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 48% of respondents had graduated from a school providing secondary education in the town of residence, while 52% had studied in other locations than their hometown.

Data shows that about half of the respondents lived with the family of origin, the rest had family structures of different forms: mother and stepfather (5.5%, most from the University of Debrecen), father and stepmother (1.7%), other relatives (2%), foster care institutions (5%, most

from the University of Oradea), foster parents or social parents (3%) and single parent families - only mother or father (about one third).

Data analysis revealed the education level of respondents' parents, i.e. a third of respondents' fathers completed primary education, 44% secondary education, and a quarter of them, higher education. A quarter of the mothers completed primary education, 46% graduated high school and a third higher education. For two thirds of the respondents, the ratio between parents' education levels was homogeneous, for 23%, the mother had a higher education level, and for almost 13%, the father had a higher education level. In the situation of around three quarters of the respondents, parents are active on the labor market (75% of fathers and 73.6% of mothers).

The analysis of the financial situation of the family was approached by using objective and subjective indicators. For 16% of respondents, high costs do not represent a burden for the family, as they could afford to save up and travel abroad. About half of the students assessed the financial situation of their family as suitable, they had all necessary things, but they could not afford higher expenses. For 22%, daily expenses were not a problem, but without savings. A tenth of respondents failed to cover their daily expenses. At the level of the whole sample, on average, covering daily needs was a problem for about 9%. Looking at household equipping, it was found that the households of the families of students from the University of Debrecen and the College of Nyíregyháza were more equipped, in average. In what students pursuing higher education in Romania are concerned, those enrolled in Partium University and the University of Oradea live in households equipped with most durable goods. Students at the University Emanuel had the lowest averages, both for parents and respondents. Students from the two Hungarian institutions were the least to have durable goods.

Interpretation of the data on secondary education found that the respondents graduated from various types of institutions, where they got the certificate required for university enrollment. The responses of the students from all five higher education institutions indicate that the majority has obtained a graduation certificate from a high school, less than 5% of them graduated from vocational branch, a quarter - technological profile, and only 15 of almost 2000 respondents attended vocational schools.

Based on the assessment of attitudes towards learning, a significant positive relationship was identified between compliance-oriented learning attitudes and materialistic values, and a negative correlation with the value factors of the private sphere, i.e., the more a student agreed with variables

that refer to compliance-oriented attitudes, the more they identified with the material and post-material values and less with the values of privacy. The goal-oriented learning attitude is connected to post-material values, while learning attitudes which imply compliance with regulations, however, relate positively with the values of privacy and a negatively to material values. In other words, the more a student identified (her)himself with values of the private sphere and less with material values, the more (s)he is prone to have a proactive approach towards learning. Moreover, compliance-oriented learning attitudes were found to have a significant positive association with the dimensions of pursuing education, as well as mobility, following the example and the selective modernization factor did, whereas, it is negatively associated with the intellectual dimension of pursuing education. In the case of goal-oriented learning attitude, there is a significant negative relationship with factors related to context and selective modernization; the compliance-oriented learning attitude is positively and significantly associated with intellectual factors.

Among the reasons for choosing a specialization, those that have a positive relationship with compliance-oriented learning attitude are: following the example, mobility and selective modernization, while having a negative relationship with student lifestyle factors. The goal-oriented learning attitude is in a positive relationship with following the example and student lifestyle and in a negative relationship with mobility and the contextual factors of the learning attitude. For those who follow the rules, a positive link was found with student lifestyle and a negative relationship with following the example and contextual factors of major choice.

As regards the variables relating to future plans, students do not have a clear vision of employment, having several scenarios for post-university life. Nearly half of respondents plan their lives in the county where HEI has its seat or in the hometown, after completing their studies. Most of the students of the College of Nyíregyháza declare themselves geographically mobile, tending to seek work in cities other than the HEI seat or hometown. In contrast, a tenth of the students from Oradea and about a quarter of students from Debrecen have chosen this answer. In what employment in the European Union is concerned, students from Partium (42.3%) are most willing to find a job in the EU, as well as a third of the students from the University of Debrecen, compared to a quarter of the students from the other institutions. Less than 20% of the respondents would be employed outside the EU. Students would be willing to work in their hometown, according to the following percentages: more than half of the students form the Partium Christian University and the College of Nyíregyháza, almost half of students from the University of Debrecen and slightly more than 40% of

students from the Emanuel University and the University of Oradea. In four out of five institutions, most respondents would like to apply for a Masters' degree. Most positive responses were received from students at the Emanuel University (78%), the share of students from Partium Christian University, the University of Oradea and the University of Debrecen is approximately 60% and the percentage from the College of Nyíregyháza 45%.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that within the studied HEIs, pursuing higher education is also linked to factors other than the selection mechanisms emerging from the social context. Accordingly, the variables created from the scales used in the questionnaire through factor analysis were analyzed using multinomial logistic regression, for answering the main questions and hypotheses of the thesis. Three of the scales corresponded to motivations, continue learning and choice of educational institution and specialization; another scale focused on the value system and another comprises learning attitudes. The variables from the models are the type of organization and different categories of specialization choice. The effect of gender, household equipping with durable goods and fathers' educational level remained highly explanatory factors in most explanatory models.

The first hypothesis refers to factors related to the institution's choice. From the analyses it was found that, according to the hypothesis, students from families with lower socio-economic status, but who are supported by their parents, choose smaller HEIs to a greater extent, while the values of the students from rural areas and first generation intellectuals are more likely related to privacy and post-material aspects; women, older students and former students of religious or private high schools have greater chances to be enrolled at the College of Nyíregyháza, Partium Christian University and Emanuel University.

The following factors significantly influence further studies: contextual and relational factors determine enrollment in smaller HEIs, motivational factors related to student lifestyle and background affect institution choice, and contextual motivation factors as well as selective modernization factors are relevant for major choice. Larger higher education institutions (the Universities of Oradea and Debrecen) are more rather to attract students who come from families of intellectuals (father with higher education level), with high socio-economic status (better equipped households), with more friends, those who speak several languages, have material values and for whom continuing education and university choice are correlated with the factors of mobility and following the example. Contrary to expectations, the part of the hypothesis claiming that students

with higher performances and males would rather choose the most prestigious institutions in the region was not verified. Based on academic performance indicators, it was measured that students with more diplomas have chosen one of the three smaller HEIs; not significant correlations regarding gender were found.

The third hypothesis stated that there are gender differences and occupational stereotypes prevail in choosing majors: men opt for more dynamic, competitive and risky majors, while women prefer majors focusing on communication, interpersonal relationships and services. Also, it was assumed that gender can be an important predictor for choosing a university / college, because smaller universities only have a limited educational offer, so it was expected that males are more likely to enroll at the two large state universities from the selected sample.

The results unveil a series of significant correlations for choosing majors, in accordance with the first argument of the third hypothesis: while the probability of choosing a field of study related to humanities is high for respondents who are females, who come from rural areas and who have post-material values, the consistent growth of the mobility factor and of the father's education level determines the increase of the probability of choosing majors related to sciences. In the model of major choice, household equipping was related to increasing options for almost all areas, except humanities (history, philosophy, theology and arts). This may mean that there is a lower probability for the group of students showing consistently higher socio-economic indicators to choose humanities.

The most important explanatory factors, among socio-economic indicators concerning the choice of specializations offered by the Universities of Oradea and Debrecen, proved to be family household endowment, the manifestation of parents' encouraging behavior, gender, father's education level, type of settlement, as well as diplomas and prizes received in grades 9-12. Factors such as mobility, following the example and intellectual reasons explained in greater extent the choice of medicine, economics, law, natural sciences, architecture and engineering. The factor of context-dependent motivations determines a significant demand for engineering and natural sciences. The choice of majors is influenced by contextual motivations and motivations referring to the development of relationships and the selective modernization factor.

In the case of smaller HEIs, the humanities category explains utmost the preference for a certain specialization. A significant result of the analysis is the fact that the probability of the option for social sciences increases 1.53 times with a disadvantaged family situation of the student, and 1.09

times with the consistent incrementation of the confidence level; the fact the number of foreign languages spoken, the support of parents and being a female generate an augmentation in the probability enrolling in a humanistic major is just as important. The lack of ethical values results in an increase of 1.11 times of the probability for choosing economics, while the number of foreign languages spoken positively influences the number of enrollments in humanities.

According to the data, objective factors of social context have an indirect influence and are important in the choice of specialization at smaller HEIs: the number of spoken languages and the origin from disadvantaged backgrounds exceed the influence of the financial situation or parents' level of education, but effects of gender cannot be ignored. Involving value systems and learning attitudes in building the model to have proven to be successful, given that they made possible the shaping of differentiated patterns of specialization choice.

The second part of the third hypothesis, which suggests that gender may be an important predictor for institution choice, was also invalidated. No significant differences were found between men and women in connection with the integration of small and large academic institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the second half of the twentieth century, the problem of social inequality manifested in education has become one of the fundamental questions of sociological research in the field of education, together with the analysis of the reforms undertaken in the education system. Education and tertiary education have become mass phenomena, increasing the demand for higher education among young people worldwide, whereas HE became more accessible. Of course, the process led to the transformation of education and training opportunities. A priority research topic generated by the expansion of higher education is related to the extent to which individuals belonging to different social classes can access university education. Although the Anglo-Saxon and Western-European scientific literature engulfs many researches in this field, in the Partium region, it is one of the less studied subjects.

In this thesis, reflections were made upon the collection of sociological instruments used for highlighting the problem of pursuing higher education. Continuing studies was considered a benchmark in the process of obtaining a status and a consequence of the expansion of higher education, also revealing the influence of explanatory variables such as personal motivations, value

systems and the dimensions learning attitudes, in addition to the social context of the individual. The decision to continue education is inextricably linked to young people's desire to build a career, to the future direction of social mobility. Becoming an intellectual is one possible solution to obtain a social status or achieve upward social mobility; for many individuals graduating from higher education institutions is considered a guarantee for a more successful future. But this paper was not intended to examine the relationship between social mobility and the education system, instead, its purpose was to analyze the decision for pursuing higher education and career choice correlated with the individual and social motivational context. The preparation, planning and interpretation of the presented sociological research were marked by the literature on motivation, social inequality and tertiary education. Those resources which explained the subject and problems of the region utmost were selected out of the large and very diverse stock of sources.

The data used in the research comprised in this thesis was extracted from a cross-sectional study carried out within the HERD cross-border project, out of which a sub-sample of 2120 undergraduate students from five higher education institutions was selected. The main goal of the thesis was to study the issues related to student motivation regarding enrollment in higher education, the choice of the academic institution and specialization. These aspects and the ones referring to the identification of similarities and differences between the studied institutions were analyzed in terms of future plans, the value systems and attitudes towards learning. A landmark in data interpretation was the sustainable model of inequalities developed by Lucas (2001). In the case of the first generation of intellectuals, the data confirms the indirect impact of social context. The interpretation of data supports the results of the model of college choice designed by Chapman (1981): social context and some characteristics of the students determine the choice of college in connection with several external factors, such as the influence of important people, features of HEIs and access to training programs.

As a result of the analysis of empirical data, it was found that, according to the hypothesis, students from families with lower socio-economic status, but who are supported by their parents, choose smaller HEIs to a greater extent, those from rural areas and first generation of intellectuals have values are more likely to privacy and post-material values, women and older students as well as former high school students who attended private or religious institutions are more likely to attend courses offered by the College of Nyíregyháza, Partium Christian University and Emanuel University.

The factors that influence pursuing higher education are the following: contextual and relational factors significantly influence enrolling in smaller HEIs, motivational factors related to context and student lifestyle are relevant for choosing the institution of HE, whereas contextual motivational factors and the selective modernization factor are significant for choosing specializations. Larger HEIs (the Universities of Oradea and Debrecen) rather attract students from families of intellectuals (father with higher education level), with high socio-economic status (better equipped households), students who have more friends, speak several languages, have material values and continuing education and university choice are correlated with the mobility factor and following the example.

Next, it was assumed that gender differences and occupational stereotypes are determinants of major choice: males choose more dynamic, more competitive study programs, which require risk-taking, while females choose study programs regarding communication, building interpersonal relationships or services; distribution by gender is also an important predictor of choosing the institution.

The results of the data regarding choosing majors unveil the following situation: while the probability of choosing a field of study related to humanities is high for respondents who are females, who come from rural areas and who have post-material values, the consistent growth of the mobility factor and of the father's education level determines the increase of the probability of choosing majors related to sciences. In the model of major choice, household endowment was related to increasing options for almost all areas, except humanities (history, philosophy, theology and arts).

A significant result of the analysis was the fact that the probability of the option for social sciences increases 1.53 times with a disadvantaged family situation of the student, and 1.09 times with the consistent incrementation of the confidence level; the fact the number of foreign languages spoken, the support of parents and being a female generate an augmentation in the probability enrolling in a humanistic major is just as important. The lack of ethical values results in an increase of 1.11 times of the probability for choosing economics, while the number of foreign languages spoken positively influences the number of enrollments in humanities.

The most important explanatory factors, among socio-economic indicators concerning the choice of specializations offered by the Universities of Oradea and Debrecen, proved to be family household endowment, the manifestation of parents' encouraging behavior, gender, father's education level, type of settlement, as well as diplomas and prizes received in grades 9-12. Factors

such as mobility, following the example and intellectual reasons explained in greater extent the choice of medicine, economics, law, natural sciences, architecture and engineering. The factor of context-dependent motivations determines a significant demand for engineering and natural sciences. The choice of majors is influenced by contextual motivations and motivations referring to the development of relationships and the selective modernization factor.

According to the data, objective factors of social context have an indirect influence and are important in the choice of specialization at smaller HEIs: the number of spoken languages and the origin from disadvantaged backgrounds of the student exceed the influence of the financial situation or parents' level of education, but the effects of gender cannot be ignored. Involving value systems and learning attitudes in building the model to have proven to be successful, given that they made possible the shaping of differentiated patterns of specialization choice.

The innovation brought by this thesis is, first of all, the fact that the nature of the mechanisms that impact on decisions to continue studies is analyzed at the level of HEIs from Partium, beyond rational evaluation and the effects of social context.

The scientific material resulting from the research can be a pillar for career counseling and institutional development, through the information on motivations to pursue higher education provided, and also serves to enrich the results of empirical research on recruitment mechanisms of cross-border higher education institutions and on young students.

Understanding motivations for major choice can be important for improving the recruitment practices of institutions, for educational policies from the academic environment, as well as sociological research in the field of education. The competition of higher education institutions to attract students requires an understanding of their preferences and decision-making mechanisms, which are used not only in the choice of institution, but also in the decision to continue their studies. Based on the presented results, universities and colleges can have access to scientific information about young people who enter them and about the typical "profile" of candidates; in the meanwhile, youth who have to take a decision can weigh their options for pursuing higher education and choosing a higher education institution and a study program more carefully. The author believes that the findings and conclusions of the research are useful for teachers involved in career guidance at school, as well.

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